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TWO COLUMNS FROM LA
DAURADE

SOME columns and a handful of mosaic cubes are all that remains of the ancient church of Notre-Dame La Daurade¹

magnificent church north of the Alps before the time of Charlemagne.

This venerable monument was destroyed in 1764 to make way for the present structure, built from the designs of the architect Hardy, which stands on the site of the old



TWO MARBLE COLUMNS, V OR VI CENTURY
FROM THE ANCIENT CHURCH, NOW DESTROYED, OF
NOTRE-DAME LA DAURADE AT TOULOUSE

at Toulouse, one of the earliest Christian churches in Gaul and certainly the most

¹For a recent discussion of the church, see Paul Clemen, *Die Romanische Monumentalmalerei in den Rheinlanden*, Düsseldorf, 1916, pp. 178, 183-197. To Clemen's bibliography add Jules de Lahondès, *Les Monuments de Toulouse. Histoire, archéologie, beaux-arts*. Toulouse, 1920—a work which unfortunately the present writer has been unable to consult.

church. Fortunately, however, we have a description of the splendid mosaics which were the chief glory of the church, in a manuscript written by Dom Lamothe² in

²L'Abbé Degert, *Les Mosaïques de l'ancienne Daurade, à Tolose*, in *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique du Midi de la France*, Nouvelle Série No. 34, séances du 29 Novembre 1904 au 31 Janvier 1905.

1633, before the destruction of the primitive edifice. Another Benedictine, Dom Martin, in his work³ on the religion of the Gauls, published in 1727, devotes a chapter to Notre-Dame La Daurade and gives a wretched engraving showing a ground plan of the church as it was in his day, a conjectural plan of the original church, and a sectional view of the interior of the sanctuary. Although, unhappily, there are discrepancies between Dom Martin's text and his illustrations, nevertheless, it is possible, from these and from Dom Lamothe's notes on the mosaics, to form some idea of the appearance and date of the destroyed church and its sumptuous decoration.

If no authentic documents exist for the early history of the church, there is an abundance of legends; for example, that the church was originally a pagan temple to Minerva or Apollo, built over the fabulous lake where was concealed the famous "or de Toulouse." But these legends are unsupported by facts. It would appear that the original building was from the first a Christian church, decagonal in plan, with six long sides and four short. It was roofed with a segmental cupola pierced by a central shaft, through which the light entered, as well as from a series of windows around the upper part of the walls. The interior walls were subdivided horizontally into three tiers of shallow niches formed by round-headed arches resting on columns.

In date this decagonal building may be assigned to the fifth or sixth century.⁴ Sometime after the construction of the original church, it became necessary to enlarge the edifice, which was done by removing three of the long walls and adding a nave, the remaining part of the old building forming the sanctuary of the enlarged church; it was in this form that the church was seen by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers. There are reasons to believe that this enlargement occurred not long after the completion of the original building, that is, within the

general period of the fifth or sixth century.⁵ It was presumably at the time of the remodeling of the church that the walls of the sanctuary of the enlarged church were covered with mosaics, in which the liberal use of gold gave to the church its name of La Daurade (*deaurata* = *daurade* = *dorée*).

In the niches of the top tier were figured scenes of the Nativity and Epiphany—the Birth of Christ and the Adoration of the Shepherds, the Visit of the Magi to Herod, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Massacre of the Innocents. Figures of Christ and of His mother occupied the central niches in the middle tier above the high altar. They were flanked by the four archangels, the princes of the apostles, the evangelists and other apostles, the four major prophets and other Old Testament figures. In the lowest tier were lesser prophets, royal ancestors and patriarchs, and a scene of the archangel Gabriel with the three youths in the fiery furnace. The wall spaces outside the niches were also richly decorated with designs of peacocks, doves, and other ornamental motives.

Although the Flight into Egypt might have been added to the scenes of the infancy of Christ and other Old Testament personages introduced in the lower tiers, nevertheless, the presumption is certainly in favor of the belief that the mosaics as described by Dom Lamothe formed a complete scheme planned for the sanctuary of the remodeled church. The mosaics, which show Byzantine influence, must have been made earlier than the middle of the eighth century, since the invocation of the archangel Uriel, represented in the Toulouse mosaics, was forbidden by the Roman Council of 745. Various indications point to the fifth or sixth century as the period of production.⁶

⁵Clemen (*op. cit.*) makes the suggestion that the nave may date as late as the sixteenth or seventeenth century, but his brief remarks on this subject are not convincing. On the contrary, the iconographical scheme of the mosaics indicates that it is probable, as well as possible, that this decoration—dating from the fifth or sixth century—was designed not for the ten-sided original church but for the seven walls of the sanctuary which remained after the remodeling.

³Dom Martin, *Traité de la religion des Gaulois*, Paris, 1727.

⁴See Clemen, *op. cit.*

⁶See Clemen, *op. cit.*

The Museum has recently acquired⁷ two marble columns, measuring respectively 74½ and 73 inches in height, which were originally in the sanctuary of Notre-Dame La Daurade. As will be seen in the illustration, the shafts of the columns are decorated with a formal grape-vine design, which covers about three fourths of the surface, leaving plain the remaining part of the shaft, which stood against the wall. This ornamental carving has a rich effect, probably enhanced originally by gilding and polychromy, of which there still remain traces. The carving is vigorous but crude, and in technique as well as in subject suggests oriental influence. The capitals are of a degenerate Corinthian type, the characteristic volutes occurring on the lateral faces only; the back is only roughly carved, but the front shows a curious version of the Ionic roll, leaf-covered and banded.

These two columns are part of a group of twenty-four from the sanctuary of La Daurade which, having escaped the demolition of the church in 1764, were given by the Benedictines in 1783 to the French archaeologist, M. de Montégut, who set them up as a circular temple to Apollo in the park of Montégut-Ségla.⁸ An inundation in 1875 destroyed the little temple: two columns were lost, one badly injured—the remaining twenty-one were housed in the vestibule of the Château de Montégut, where they remained until 1912, when, according to Clemen, they were sold out of France. Other columns are in the museum of Toulouse.

The columns fall into three groups. The first, consisting of five columns formerly in the Château de Montégut and including one in a fragmentary condition, is represented by the new accessions of the Museum; one capital of this type is in the

museum at Toulouse. The second group consists of fourteen columns in the Montégut lot, and of three columns and a fourth shaft in the Toulouse museum; this type is characterized by the spiral fluting of the shaft and by its late Roman composite capital. The third group consists of four columns in the Toulouse museum, with capitals of a debased Corinthian type. The columns are all of white marble from the Pyrenees, with the exception of three which are of blue marble. The surviving columns represent only about a third of the original number which separated the niches in the sanctuary.

The columns with the spiral shafts may be assigned without difficulty to the period of the fifth or sixth century within which we believe the church to have been constructed and decorated. The type occurs frequently on the Gallo-Roman sarcophagi of the fourth and fifth centuries. The columns with the grape-vine ornament show the greatest analogies with the carved ornament on a group of sarcophagi from the southwest of Gaul which are attributed to the sixth or seventh century. A sarcophagus from the cemetery of Saint Saturnin, now in the museum at Toulouse, may be instanced;⁹ the survival of the classical theme of Castor and Pollux, represented in the central panel, makes it probable that this sarcophagus, which has also two panels of grape-vine ornament very similar in style to that on our columns, dates as early as the sixth century. On a sarcophagus of the fourth or fifth century at Arles¹⁰ the Saviour is represented between two columns ornamented with the vine motive in a formal design recalling the recent accessions of the Museum. Our columns with the vine decoration are presumably not later than the sixth century; they may be as early as the fifth.

J. B.

⁷From the Rogers Fund, with contributions from George Blumenthal and Henry Walters.

⁸Joseph de Malafosse. *Les Colonnes Gallo-Romaines de L' Eglise Notre-Dame la Daurade*, in *Album des monuments et de l' art ancien du Midi de la France*, Toulouse, 1897, I, p. 105.

⁹E. Le Blant, *Les Sarcophages Chrétiens de la Gaule*, 1886, plate XXXVIII, 1.

¹⁰E. Le Blant, *Étude sur les Sarcophages Chrétiens antiques de la ville d'Arles*, Paris, 1878, plate IX, p. 16.